

IMAGINATION “An Issue of the Heart”

Introduction

Mark 12:28-30

28 And one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, and perceiving that he had answered them well, asked him, Which is the first commandment of all?

29 And Jesus answered him, The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord:

30 And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment. KJV¹

In response to the scribe's question, Jesus quotes the Shema, the watchword of Israel's faith. It is found in Deuteronomy 6.²

Deuteronomy 6:4-7

4 Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD:

5 And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.

6 And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart:

7 And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.

There is a slight problem. The Scripture in Deuteronomy clearly states heart, soul, and might. Jesus said heart, soul, mind, and strength. What gives? I had always been taught that Jesus was amplifying this section of Scripture and drawing attention to the mind, which is part of the soul. Was the addition of mind an innovation by Jesus?

Luke 10:25-28

25 And, behold, a certain lawyer stood up, and tempted him, saying, Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?

26 He said unto him, What is written in the law? how readest thou?

27 And he answering said, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself.

28 And he said unto him, Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live.

When Jesus asked the lawyer how he read the Law regarding receiving eternal life, the lawyer said, “Love God with all your heart, soul, strength, and mind.” In that the lawyer included “mind” tells us that it was something in the understanding of the Jewish culture, not an innovation of Jesus. In other words, the idea of the mind being included somewhere within or in between heart, soul, and strength was understood by the first century readers of the Jewish text. They are getting something that we are not.

¹ All references are from the King James Version of the Bible unless otherwise noted.

² Deuteronomy seems to be a particular favorite of the Lord's.

The word translated “mind” in Mark 12 and Luke 10 is dianoia. What we generally think of when we talk about the mind, especially when we talk about the mind being part of the soul, is reflected in the Greek word nous, which means “the seat of reflective consciousness or understanding.”³ Dianoia, in contrast, refers to the working of the mind—actually thinking it through, meditating, imagining.

Luke 1:51

He hath shewed strength with his arm; he hath scattered the proud in the imagination [Gk. *dianoia*] of their hearts.

These imaginations were in their hearts. The heart of man corresponds to the spirit of man. In Deuteronomy 6:5, the Hebrew for heart is lebab and for soul is nephesh. Nephesh is translated “mind” 15 times in the King James Version. Lebab is translated “mind” 4 times and “understanding” 3 times. Its related word, leb, is translated “mind” 11 times and “understanding” 20 times. Though English translation preferences don’t have any extensive authority in and of themselves (Lord knows that the King James translators got it wrong more than once!), they certainly do aid us in understanding the original meaning. By relegating the mind solely to the soulish realm, we have missed an important facet of life.

Imagination exists in all parts of our being; spirit, soul, and body. But they are most powerful when originating from the heart—the spirit of man. It is the working of this heart, the imaging of our inmost desires, that God wants harnessed in His love. “Mind” was spoken by Jesus and the lawyer in citing the Great Commandment because it was understood in the use of “heart” (as well as “soul”).

The following is a commentary on Deuteronomy 6:5 from the Misna:

“‘with all thy heart’, with thy imaginations, with the good imagination and with the evil imagination; and ‘with all thy soul’, even if he should take away thy soul; and ‘with all thy strength’, with all thy ‘mammon’ or riches; or otherwise, ‘with all thy might’, with every measure he measures unto thee, do thou measure unto him.”⁴

Why does God want our imaginations? Because He has invested them with tremendous power and potential.

I. Imaginations of the Heart

Genesis 11:4-7

4 And they said, Go to, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth.

5 And the LORD came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of men builded.

³ From Vine’s Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words

⁴ Beracot, c. 9. sect. 5.

6 And the LORD said, Behold, the people is one, and they have all one language; and this they begin to do: and now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do.

7 Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech.

An imaginative idea, a grand plan, has a way of capturing the hearts of people. If they come together in agreement and understanding and put their might behind the imagination, they can accomplish great things. "Nothing will be restrained from them which they have imagined to do." This is an amazing statement made by our God.

What would our world look like if the imaginations of the people of God were wholly given over to Him and the advancement of His kingdom? What could we not do?

Psalms 92:5

O LORD, how great are thy works! and thy thoughts are very deep.

An imagination harnessed to God is one that thinks as He thinks. His thoughts are deep. In contrast, ours are vain.

Psalms 94:11

The LORD knoweth the thoughts of man, that they are vanity.

Proverbs 12:5

The thoughts of the righteous are right: but the counsels of the wicked are deceit.

When we think rightly, we go in the right way. The wicked who are bound to vain imaginations wind up deceiving themselves and others about them.

Proverbs 15:26

The thoughts of the wicked are an abomination to the LORD: but the words of the pure are pleasant words.

We don't want our thoughts to be abominable to the Lord. If we fill ourselves with His pure words, our communications and plans will be pleasing to Him.

Genesis 8:21

And the LORD smelled a sweet savour; and the LORD said in his heart, I will not again curse the ground any more for man's sake; for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth; neither will I again smite any more every thing living, as I have done.

Our problem since the fall is that our heart has been darkened. A dark heart leads to evil imaginations. Without the new birth, this is unavoidable.

Jeremiah 7:23-26

23 But this thing commanded I them, saying, Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and ye shall be my people: and walk ye in all the ways that I have commanded you, that it may be well unto you.

24 But they hearkened not, nor inclined their ear, but walked in the counsels and in the imagination of their evil heart, and went backward, and not forward.

25 Since the day that your fathers came forth out of the land of Egypt unto this day I have even sent unto you all my servants the prophets, daily rising up early and sending them:

26 Yet they hearkened not unto me, nor inclined their ear, but hardened their neck: they did worse than their fathers.

When we don't listen to the Lord nor incline our ear to Him, we wind up walking in the counsel and imagination of our own heart. We backslide. We don't move forward into the heart of God. We fall back into our own vanity and become hard hearted.

Psalms 81:10-14

10 I am the LORD thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt: open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it.

11 But my people would not hearken to my voice; and Israel would none of me.

12 So I gave them up unto their own hearts' lust: and they walked in their own counsels.

13 Oh that my people had hearkened unto me, and Israel had walked in my ways!

14 I should soon have subdued their enemies, and turned my hand against their adversaries.

"I gave them up unto their own hearts' lust." The word translated "lust" in verse 12 is also translated "imagination." (See Jeremiah 3:17). Because they wouldn't hearken to the Lord, He gave them over to the imaginations of their own heart. What does this sound like?

Romans 1:20-24

20 For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse:

21 Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened.

22 Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools,

23 And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things.

24 Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves:

God gave them up to the uncleanness through the lust of their own hearts because they opted to follow vain imaginations. The root of all vain imaginations is idolatry. It is where we were held captive until God saved us by His grace.

Ephesians 2:3

Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others.

Ephesians 4:17-20

17 This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind,

18 Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart:

19 Who being past feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness.

20 But ye have not so learned Christ;

When we walked in the vanity of our minds, our understanding—our imagination—was darkened because of ignorance, because of hardness of heart. It is a heart issue. Understanding that this mind, the imagination, resides in the heart of man may help us better understand the nature of the New Covenant.

II. His Law in Our Hearts

Hebrews 8:10-13

10 For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind [*dianoia*], and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people:

11 And they shall not teach every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest.

12 For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more.

13 In that he saith, A new covenant, he hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away.

I used to read this and wonder how it could be. I know that I don't have the Law of God memorized, supernaturally or otherwise. How is that His law is written in my mind?

Hebrews 10:16-17

16 This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds [*dianoia*] will I write them;

17 And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more.

It is in the mind of the heart that He has written His Law. The soul mind reasons things out, the heart knows. This is why no man would have to teach his brother "Know the Lord." Because He has brought light to our hearts by His Spirit, we all know Him. The heart knows things the mind can't comprehend. In the imagination, things come often full-formed. Then the soul mind has to figure it out. With the mind, we reason. With the heart, we understand. The mind is the seat of intelligence, the heart that of intuition. In the mind reside the plans of man. But his heart houses his dreams. God wants all of our dreams.

2 Corinthians 3:3

Forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart.

He has written His word upon our hearts with His Spirit that we might give birth to dreams with eternal consequence.

III. A Man After God's Own Heart

Acts 13:22

And when he had removed him, he raised up unto them David to be their king; to whom also he gave testimony, and said, I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after mine own heart, which shall fulfil all my will.

David was a man after God's own heart. He wanted what God wanted. This is what he had to say about desires.

Psalms 37:3-5

3 Trust in the LORD, and do good; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed.

4 Delight thyself also in the LORD; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart.

5 Commit thy way unto the LORD; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass.

I've heard this explained two main ways: if we trust God, He will give us what we desire, or if we trust God He will put the desires into our heart. I think they are both right. But I want to focus on the first one here.

1 Chronicles 17:1-2

1 Now it came to pass, as David sat in his house, that David said to Nathan the prophet, Lo, I dwell in an house of cedars, but the ark of the covenant of the LORD remaineth under curtains.

2 Then Nathan said unto David, Do all that is in thine heart; for God is with thee.

David had it in his heart to place the ark of God in a cedar palace. Nathan knew that David was favored of God, so it was somewhat logical for him to give David the go ahead. After all, what had the Lord ever kept from David's hand?

1 Chronicles 17:3-6

3 And it came to pass the same night, that the word of God came to Nathan, saying,

4 Go and tell David my servant, Thus saith the LORD, Thou shalt not build me an house to dwell in:

5 For I have not dwelt in an house since the day that I brought up Israel unto this day; but have gone from tent to tent, and from one tabernacle to another.

6 Wheresoever I have walked with all Israel, spake I a word to any of the judges of Israel, whom I commanded to feed my people, saying, Why have ye not built me an house of cedars?

Problem was, being in a building was never part of God's plan. He had never spoken through His judges that they should build Him a house. This was an idea birthed in the heart of David.

1 Chronicles 28:1-3

1 And David assembled all the princes of Israel, the princes of the tribes, and the captains of the companies that ministered to the king by course, and the captains over the thousands, and captains over the hundreds, and the stewards over all the substance and possession of the king, and of his sons, with the officers, and with the mighty men, and with all the valiant men, unto Jerusalem.

2 Then David the king stood up upon his feet, and said, Hear me, my brethren, and my people: As for me, I had in mine heart to build an house of rest for the ark of the covenant of the LORD, and for the footstool of our God, and had made ready for the building:

3 But God said unto me, Thou shalt not build an house for my name, because thou hast been a man of war, and hast shed blood.

"I had in mine heart to build an house of rest for the ark of the covenant of the Lord." This was David's desire, not God's. But God knew David's heart. It was a heart that pursued after the Lord. David's motivation was pure and the Lord answered his desire superabundantly. Not only did He allow David's son to build the temple, He promised David that through him the Messiah would come. Talk about doing more than we can ask or think!

1 Chronicles 28:4-10

4 Howbeit the LORD God of Israel chose me before all the house of my father to be king over Israel for ever: for he hath chosen Judah to be the ruler; and of the house of Judah, the house of my father; and among the sons of my father he liked me to make me king over all Israel:

5 And of all my sons, (for the LORD hath given me many sons,) he hath chosen Solomon my son to sit upon the throne of the kingdom of the LORD over Israel.

6 And he said unto me, Solomon thy son, he shall build my house and my courts: for I have chosen him to be my son, and I will be his father.

7 Moreover I will establish his kingdom for ever, if he be constant to do my commandments and my judgments, as at this day.

8 Now therefore in the sight of all Israel the congregation of the LORD, and in the audience of our God, keep and seek for all the commandments of the LORD your God: that ye may possess this good land, and leave it for an inheritance for your children after you for ever.

9 And thou, Solomon my son, know thou the God of thy father, and serve him with a perfect heart and with a willing mind: for the LORD searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts: if thou seek him, he will be found of thee; but if thou forsake him, he will cast thee off for ever.

10 Take heed now; for the LORD hath chosen thee to build an house for the sanctuary: be strong, and do it.

The Lord searches the hearts and understands the imaginations of the thoughts (Heb 4:12). David's heart was pure. He didn't think it was right for him to be living in a palace when the Lord was still in a tent. Because his heart was pure, God included David's desire into His overall plan of redemption. He gave him the desires of his heart.

How did David's dream get birthed into the physical realm?

1 Chronicles 28:11-12

11 Then David gave to Solomon his son the pattern of the porch, and of the houses thereof, and of the treasuries thereof, and of the upper chambers thereof, and of the inner parlours thereof, and of the place of the mercy seat,

12 And the pattern of all that he had by the spirit, of the courts of the house of the LORD, and of all the chambers round about, of the treasuries of the house of God, and of the treasuries of the dedicated things:

He had the pattern by the Spirit.

1 Chronicles 28:19

All this, said David, the LORD made me understand in writing by his hand upon me, even all the works of this pattern.

David was a man after God's own heart. He loved the Lord with all his heart, all his soul, all his mind, and all his strength. He had a desire to do something for God that God had never asked for. And in response, the Lord gave supernatural life to David's dream and gave him revelation on how to make it happen.

God doesn't want zombies. He created us for His companionship. He wants us to take an active part in His epic of redemption. All He asks for is all of our imagination.